

REMARKS

Applicants' attorney thanks the Examiner for his comments, and for his thoughtful analysis of the prior art. Applicants affirm the election of Claims 1-6, 8 and 10-32 for prosecution. Independent Claims 1 and 18 have been amended to indicate that the first and second superabsorbent polymer precursor compositions are each added "as droplets or microdroplets" to the fibrous web. Support for this amendment is found on page 13, lines 16-19. Independent Claim 28 already recites that each superabsorbent polymer precursor composition is added "in a dropwise fashion." Claims 31 and 32 have been amended to replace "precursor" with "pre-formed."

Independent Claims 1, 18 and 28 are directed to a process for making an absorbent fibrous web composite. Each claim recites the steps of providing a pre-formed fibrous web, adding a first superabsorbent polymer precursor composition to the fibrous web, and separately adding a second superabsorbent polymer precursor composition to the fibrous web. As indicated on page 12, lines 14-22, the phrase "separately applied" means that the two precursor compositions are applied in a manner such that they do not contact each other before they contact the fibrous web. The superabsorbent polymer precursor compositions contact each other, and chemically react with each other, only upon or after being applied to the fibrous web.

Accordingly, Claims 1, 18 and 28 require that a) both superabsorbent polymer precursor compositions are applied as droplets or microdroplets, or in a dropwise fashion, and b) the superabsorbent polymer precursor compositions do not contact each other before they are applied to the fibrous web.

The Examiner rejected Claims 31 and 32 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. This rejection has been overcome by the amendment to Claims 31 and 32.

The Examiner rejected Claims 1-3, 10, 12-19 and 21-31 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as anticipated by U.S. Patent 4,892,754 to Itoh et al. This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Itoh et al. discloses a water absorptive composite formed by applying an aqueous solution of a polymerizable monomer to a fibrous substrate, polymerizing the monomer applied to the substrate to form a composite, and irradiating the composite with ultraviolet rays (Col. 4, lines 1-19). The disclosed process is intended to be an improvement over a prior art process wherein a water absorptive composite is first impregnated with an aqueous monomer solution, and a polymerization initiator is then added in mist form (Col. 2, lines 38-57). The prior art technique allegedly leaves areas of unreacted monomer in the substrate.

Itoh et al. further discloses several inventive methods for combining an aqueous monomer solution with a polymerization initiator and a fibrous substrate. In one embodiment, the polymerizable monomer solution is combined with a radical polymerization initiator prior to adding the solution to the fibrous web, instead of being separately added to the fibrous web (Col. 6, lines 45-49). In another embodiment, the radical polymerization initiator is applied uniformly to the fibrous web, and the aqueous monomer solution is separately applied by spraying (Col. 6, lines 49-59). Out of six specific methods listed, four of them involve pre-mixing of the aqueous monomer solution and polymerization initiator

(Col. 8, lines 1-40). A fifth method involves impregnating a fibrous substrate with an aqueous monomer solution, then adding a polymerization initiator in a mist form (Col. 8, lines 41-47). A sixth method uses only irradiation to initiate the polymerization (Col. 8, lines 48-53). The Examples of Itoh et al. employ similar techniques.

Itoh et al. does not disclose a process in which a first superabsorbent polymer precursor composition is applied as droplets or microdroplets to a fibrous substrate, and a second superabsorbent polymer precursor composition is separately applied as droplets or microdroplets. In every method of Itoh et al. which applies both compositions as droplets, the compositions are mixed together and are not separately applied. In every method of Itoh et al. which applies the compositions separately, at least one of the compositions is applied by impregnation or uniform coating, and not as droplets or microdroplets. Accordingly, Itoh et al. does not anticipate any of Claims 1-3, 10, 12-19, or 21-31.

The Examiner rejected Claims 4-6, 11, 20 and 32 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as obvious over Itoh et al. This rejection is respectfully traversed. These claims each depend from one of Claims 1, 18 and 28, and are patentable for at least the same reasons. Itoh et al. does not disclose or suggest a method wherein each of the first and second superabsorbent polymer compositions are applied as droplets or microdroplets and wherein the compositions are separately applied. Furthermore, Itoh et al. does not recognize any application technique which allows two compositions to be separately applied as droplets, with sufficient precision that the droplets contact each other after application to cause a chemical reaction.

The Examiner rejected Claim 8 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as obvious over Itoh et al. in view of U.S. Patent 5,248,524 to Soderlund and U.S. Patent 5,547,747 to Trokhan

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et al. This rejection is respectfully traversed. Claim 8 depends from Claim 1, and is patentable for at least the same reasons. None of the references discloses or suggests applying first and second superabsorbent polymer precursor compositions, separately, and each in the form of droplets or microdroplets, to a fibrous web. Soderlund describes a process for depositing superabsorbent particles that have already been formed. No superabsorbent polymer precursor composition or chemical reaction is involved. Trokhan et al. discloses applying only one liquid precursor composition in a dropwise fashion.

Applicants believe that the claims, as now presented, are in condition for allowance. If the Examiner feels that any issues remain unresolved, then Applicants' attorney respectfully requests a telephone call from the Examiner, and a telephone interview.

Respectfully submitted,



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